DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 978 FL 019 539

AUTHOR Odean, Patricia M.
TITLE Teaching Paraphrasing to ESL Students.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT MinneTESOL Journal; v6 p15-27 1987

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; *English (Second Language); *English for Academic Purposes; *Language Processing; Reading Comprehension; *Reading Strategies; Second Language Instruction; *Writing Exercises
IDENTIFIERS *Paraphrase

ABSTRACT

Students of English as a Second Language (ESL) in an academic program must be able to write paraphrases, but they often lack strategies for accomplishing this complex task successfully. The process requires skill in reading, comprehension, analysis, selection of new structures and vocabulary, and integration into a written product. Paraphrases usually originate in sentences with sophisticated syntax, so the student must first be able to understand difficult passages in detail. This can be assisted by familiarizing students with the strategies of generating simpler statements, extracting sentence kernels, identifying word groups, practicing with cloze exercises, identifying referents, and answering questions to focus attention on aspects of the text. Second, the student must know how to rewrite the passage, by recognizing and exploiting synonymity and combining sentences for structural flexibility. Some texts are available for teaching these skills. Students must eventually see the process as an exercise in rethinking information and telling it in their own voices. For students able to produce paraphrases without the original text, learning to use paraphrases is the next stage. Reading different texts on the same topic or completed research papers is helpful. Competent use of source material and integration into academic papers is the ultimate goal. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

ERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
ATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Odean, Patricia M.
THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
FORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Teaching Paraphrasing to ESL Students

Patricia M. Odean
Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute
Albuquerque, New Mexico

ED336978

ESL students in an academic program must be able to write paraphrases, yet they often lack strategies for accomplishing this task successfully. The task of paraphrasing requires reading, analyzing, and writing skills. In this paper those skills are identified, and exercises are suggested to promote their development. By dealing with each skill separately and then combining them gradually, students are better prepared to undertake the complex task of paraphrasing.

Paraphrasing is a daily activity. In speaking, we paraphrase our own words to provide clarification or emphasis. We paraphrase a conversation partner's words to show we comprehend or to check our comprehension. Often we contribute to a discussion by paraphrasing a third person's words. Paraphrasing, in these situations, is done without conscious effort.

But writing paraphrases for academic purposes requires conscious attention. This kind of paraphrasing requires fitting another writer's ideas into one's own text while avoiding plagiarizing the first writer's text. It is a complex activity, composed of reading, analyzing, and writing skills. The paraphraser must decode a text, fully comprehend it, analyze how it relates to the ideas of the text under construction, select new vocabulary and structures to restate the ideas, and, finally, judge whether all of these steps have been successfully completed. Considering the complexity of the task, it is not surprising that college instructors complain of plagiarism in student papers. What may be surprising, however, is that most

FL019539

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

college composition textbooks lack instructional materials for developing paraphrasing ability. A few examples might be provided, or the advice to avoid plagiarism by restating the text "in your own words" might appear in a brief paragraph. Until recently, textbooks did not provide strategies for writing paraphrases, perhaps because paraphrasing seems like an overwhelming task.

A sensible strategy for teaching a task which appears overwhelming is first to discover the component skills of the task and then to classify them in order to design a logical sequence for teaching. Obviously, many of the skills we teach in our reading, composition, grammar, and vocabulary classes contribute to a student's ability to paraphrase. But there is more we could be doing, and some we could be doing sooner.

Classification of skills needed for paraphrasing can begin with a distinction between how to produce a paraphrase and how to use one. Producing paraphrases consists of reading and rewriting an isolated passage. Using a paraphrase consists of selecting an appropriate passage to paraphrase and integrating it into a new text. Although this division does not reflect the actual sequence of steps we go through when we paraphrase, it is nonetheless a pedagogically useful division.[1]

PRODUCING PARAPHRASES

Understanding the source material

Paraphrases usually originate in sentences which have sophisticated syntax. Thus, to produce a successful paraphrase, students must be able to understand difficult passages in detail. The ESL college freshmen who were subjects for research reported in Odean (1986) demonstrated a weakness in

[1]The sequence of steps we go through in paraphrasing is likely to be 1) reading, 2) selecting, 3) writing, and 4) integrating; my label "producing" combines the first and third steps; "using" combines the second and fourth.

reading skill. For example, one of the texts they paraphrased was:

> A child who witnesses parental attempts to solve family problems or release frustrations through aggressive behavior is likely to incorporate this into his or her own behavior patterns. If being abused as a child does in fact lead to aggressive behavior, the seeds of this cycle may be manifested early in life relationships with peers and/or siblings, and, when greater strength is gained, in confrontations with parents or caretakers. (Kratcoski, 1982, p. 437.)

One ESL student's paraphrase of this passage included:

> By looking at the child's behavior...you could notice whether a child is being abused or not.

Clearly, this student and others like him need more practice and better strategies for understanding complex passages. In the following sections, I will discuss exercises for developing such strategies.

Simplification exercises

Familiarizing students with the strategy of generating simpler restatements of a difficult passage is one way to help them learn to understand such passages. The following exercise is an example of how to begin this process:

> Directions: Identify the statement which has the same meaning as the following:
>
> A child who witnesses parental attempts to solve problems or release frustrations through aggressive behavior is likely to incorporate this into his or her own behavior.
>
> a) Parents usually respond to violent children by using violence.
> b) If a child sees his parents use violence, he will probably learn to be violent.
> c) If a child is violent, it is because his parents are violent.

Students must, of course, be required to produce simplifications as well as recognize them. To begin with, it may be best to

practice producing simplifications in speech. Since speech usually has simpler syntax than writing, simplifying through speech may come more easily. And even when students are ready to simplify in writing, it may be useful for them to have the opportunity to discuss passages before writing simplifications. A student who understands a text but has difficulty simplifying it may be helped by being asked to explain it to someone who doesn't understand it (or at least pretends not to). The explanation is likely to result in simplification.

Extracting sentence kernels

Barnitz (1979) and Saville-Troike (1979) agree that having students extract sentence kernels can help them understand difficult sentences. This process is also referred to as "decombining" sentences. Exercises based on the following example (which includes the expected responses) can familiarize students with this strategy.

> Directions: Write three simple sentences using only the information provided in the following sentence:
>
> Democracy was invented as a device for reconciling government with liberty.
>
> 1. *Democracy was invented.*
> 2. *Democracy is a device.*
> 3. *Democracy reconciles government with liberty.*

Identifying word groups

Saville-Troike (1979) emphasizes the importance of reading in phrases. In order to do this, students need to recognize the boundaries between word groups, even in passages with complex syntax. For example, a proficient reader would divide the following between *civilization* and *men*:

> At the dawn of civilization men must have counted new moons and quarters to measure time intervals... (Kuhn, 1957)

One of the subjects in Odean (1986) divided the sentence incorrectly, resulting in an awkward noun phrase and a

misunderstanding of the initial prepositional phrase. The student's paraphrase read:

> The civilization men organize fundamental units into long term calendar which is easily understood by counting new moons and quarters many times at dawn...

Exercises which require students to divide passages into word groups can be done at all reading levels to diagnose problems. Answers to these exercises should be discussed, since there may be several acceptable solutions. Both Grellet (1981) and Saville-Troike (1979) include exercises for developing the skill of reading in phrases.

Cloze exercises

Cloze exercises require students to fill in blanks which have been created by deleting words from a text. Although cloze exercises have traditionally been used for testing, they can help students learn how words function in texts by focusing attention on how logical possibilities are limited by the syntax and meaning of a text. The following exercise is based on one of the passages cited above:

> Directions: Fill in the blanks with appropriate words.
>
> A child who witnesses parental attempts to _____ family problems or release frustrations through aggressive behavior is likely to incorporate this into his or her own behavior patterns. If being abused as a child does in fact lead to aggressive _____, the seeds of this cycle may be manifested early in life relationshiops with peers and/or _____, and, when greater strength is gained, in confrontations with _____ or caretakers.

An additional benefit of cloze exercises is that they foster an awareness of what constitutes a synonym. Also, they can be easily prepared by teachers.

Identifying referents

Pearson (1981) emphasizes the need to give students practice in understanding reference early in their language learning. Misunderstanding reference can cause difficulties in complicated passages, with resulting faulty paraphrasing. Students should be encouraged to sort out referents in difficult passages, as suggested by Grellet (1981). An exercise in identifying referents might look like this:

> Directions: Draw an arrow from the underlined words to the word or words they refer to.
>
> Democracy was invented as a device for reconciling government with liberty. It is clear that government is necessary if anything worthy to be called civilization is to exist, but all history shows that any set of men entrusted with power over another set will abuse their power if they can do so with impunity. Democracy is intended to make men's tenure of power temporary and dependent upon popular approval. In so far as it achieves this, it prevents the worst abuses of power.

Answering questions

Finally, questioning can be used to focus attention on various aspects of a text to determine what type of constructions may be interfering with comprehension. Such aspects include meaning, reference, inference, and grammar. The following questions are based on the passage above about child abuse:

1. Who are the first group of people children are likely to behave aggressively with? [meaning]
2. What does 'this cycle' in the second sentence refer to? [reference]
3. Does the author believe it has been proven that children who are abused develop aggressive behavior? [inference]
4. What are the subject and main verb of the first sentence? [grammar]

Developing flexibility for rewriting

Recognizing and exploiting synonymity

The second skill I identified in producing paraphrases was that of rewriting the passage. If students are to master this skill, they must begin by learning, early in their instruction, to recognize semantic and syntactic synonymity. This is a prerequisite to exploiting synonymity as a successful paraphraser does. Students can be encouraged to make productive use of synonymous expressions early in their ESL work as well. To this end, Pearson (1981) suggests that students, in answering comprehension questions about a reading, should not be allowed to copy from the text. This will encourage them to build syntactic and semantic flexibility.

Sentence-combining

Sentence-combining exercises can also be used to develop flexibility in structure. Klassen (1976) tested the effects of sentence-combining exercises on intermediate ESL students and found that they were very useful in expediting syntactic development. Zamel (1980) also acknowledges that sentence-combining "can help the students understand that the sentence is a base structure to which other information can be attached rather than a string of words that cannot be broken into or rearranged" (p. 89).

Sentence-combining can be difficult. It requires preparation and follow-up. An exercise can begin with a discussion of the relationships among the short sentences provided. Then individuals or small groups can work to combine the sentences. The products can be compared to those of other students. Sentence-combining can often reveal difficulties students are having with grammar. Tackling these problems can help them both in reading and in writing.

A number of books for native speakers of English provide sentence-combining activities. Two which can be used for non-native speakers as well are Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg (1979) and Strong (1973). Provided that vocabulary and content are discussed before students combine sentences, these

books are suitable for intermediate and advanced ESL students.

Rewriting the passage

Some sources for developing rewriting strategies

The flexibility that students gain from an understanding of synonymity and from sentence-combining exercises must eventually be put to use in the actual rewriting of passages from sources. A few recent non-ESL textbooks may be useful in helping students when they are ready to begin rewriting passages. Bazerman (1985) provides and exemplifies strategies for restating ideas. Bazerman suggests that students first substitute synonyms into the original passage, aided by a thesaurus, and then restructure the sentences. Restructuring, according to Bazerman, can consist of breaking longer sentences into shorter ones, combining short sentences into longer ones, changing the verb structure of the sentence (changing active to passive, for example), or moving phrases. These suggestions are similar to those of Spatt (1983), who proposes that students first write a "literal paraphrase" in which synonyms have been substituted for key words, and then use the literal paraphrase to write a "free paraphrase"--one in which the sentence pattern will be altered to avoid sounding stilted. Spatt also provides examples and exercises for learning these techniques.

Kennedy and Smith (1986) propose an approach similar to that of Bazerman and Spatt, but provide more examples and exercises for the discrete steps than the other authors. Hence, their materials are probably more useful for ESL students. They discuss, for example, how to move phrases, and they include an exercise which provides practice in that skill.

Setting aside the original text

Strategies such as moving phrases, changing voice, substituting synonyms and the like are important, but they may, if overemphasized, lead students to see paraphrasing as simply a matter of manipulating another writer's words. Students must eventually see paraphrasing more as an exercise in rethinking information and letting it come out in their own voices. To this

end, the best strategy may be for the students to set aside the original text long enough to forget the wording but not the information. The paraphrases that result from this strategy are likely to be less artificial and more in tune with the students' own prose. Paraphrases written in this way can still be checked for accuracy by later scrutiny of the original alongside the paraphrase.

USING PARAPHRASES

Students who have been provided with passages to practice on and have written paraphrases in isolation are ready to learn the more difficult skill of using paraphrases. To begin with, students must learn how to select appropriate passages for paraphrasing and how to integrate the paraphrases into their own texts.

Selecting material to paraphrase

Analyzing material and relating it to ideas outside the text

Like producing paraphrases, using paraphrases begins with reading. Early in learning to read, students need to become aware of how different passages function in a text. Many reading textbooks have exercises which help students recognize arguments, details, explanations, and examples. In addition to understanding how passages function within the text in which they are found, students must also learn to relate the passages to ideas outside the text. The teacher can help students develop this skill starting with the earliest stages of reading--by encouraging discussions which diverge from the reading and then go back to the text to isolate passages which might relate to the discussion. Another way to help students develop the skill of relating a reading to ideas outside the reading is to have students read texts from different sources on the same topic and discuss how the texts compare and contrast not only as a whole, but also in specific passages.

Examining sample research papers

Having students look at finished research papers can give them an idea of how other writers have chosen and used material for

paraphrasing. Many textbooks on writing research papers provide models, some including excerpts from the sources used. Both Bazerman (1985) and Lester (1984) provide models with marginal notes explaining how the writer used various sources.

Integrating the paraphrase

In addition to selecting passages from sources, students must learn to integrate them into their papers. Again, examining how other writers have handled this process, as in the exercises in Bazerman (1985) and Lester (1984), can be helpful. Such textual features as how much original material appears with the paraphrases and how paraphrases and quotations can be combined can help students learn to make decisions when writing their own papers. Noting the language used to signal the purposes of the paraphrases--purposes such as presenting an opposing opinion or providing an example--can guide students in making their own papers more coherent.

The problem of the "cut-and-paste" paper

A major pitfall students need to avoid is that of producing a "cut-and-paste" paper. The cut-and-paste paper results from viewing source material as bits of information to be pieced together. Students must be encouraged instead to view source material as something they can use to supplement their own ideas and interpretations. Students who are not confident of their English skills often have difficulty accepting this view, especially since most academic writing evolves out of reading. It becomes easy to let the sources take over; it becomes difficult for students to discover their proper roles as authors.

How can the teacher help students become masters rather than servants of their sources? Having students set aside their readings and do prewriting activities (including discussions) to explore their reactions to the topic and what they have read can help them put the sources into perspective and arrive at their own point of view about the topic. Having established their own positions, they will be better able to provide solid skeletons of papers, to which they can add source material. If they establish

that skeleton first, they have a paper which can stand on its own, independent of its sources.

A GRADUAL APPROACH

In order to help students gain confidence in themselves as authors and competent users of source material, a gradual approach to using sources is helpful. Students can start by using interviews rather than articles as source material. Using "ordinary people" as sources should encourage students to include their own ideas (avoiding the "cut and paste" problem), particularly if they have been guided to choose an interviewee with an opinion on a topic which is in opposition to their own opinions.

Students can begin including paraphrases of the spoken word early in their writing instruction. Something as simple as discussing a topic with a classmate and reporting the results in a short paragraph can result in a paraphrase such as the following:

> José said that he thinks Americans are friendly, but I don't agree because no American has ever invited me to his house to eat.

Later, a similar exercise can be done with written material: students can write essays on a topic, read each other's essays, and then write a report of how their ideas compared. This use of the classmates' writing as source material can provide a painless entry into paraphrasing work using the written word as source material.

Beginning to write papers from a single source rather than multiple sources makes the task of learning to use paraphrases less complicated. The number of sources can be increased as students become more comfortable writing papers. As the number of sources increases, so does the need for skill in synthesizing information. Munsell and Clough (1984), in a text designed for advanced ESL writers, provide examples and exercises to help students learn to write syntheses.

Having groups of students working from the same sources can be advantageous for both the students and the teacher. It allows

for discussions among the students on the topic and the readings. Furthermore, because the number of articles is minimized, the teacher can become familiar with all the reading material in order to guide the students in using it and evaluate their success.

If the teacher also provides the articles in the beginning stages of teaching how to write research papers, it eases the students' burden, allowing them to concentrate on the writing process. Also, this guarantees that appropriate source materials are used--sources which resemble those the students might use in later academic writing but which are suitable for their reading level. For a later paper, each student might be asked to provide one article, and the sources can be pooled. Eventually, the students should be ready to accept full responsibility for researching sources. Two ESL texts which can help students develop researching skills are Shoemaker (1985) and Byrd, Drum, and Wittkopf (1981).

By gradually preparing students to use paraphrases in writing research papers, teachers will not only have made the process of writing papers less formidable, but will also have helped students learn important reading, writing, and analyzing skills.
□

The author

Patricia M. Odean taught composition classes for non-native speakers at the University of Minnesota before moving to New Mexico in the summer of 1986. She now teaches at the Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute.

REFERENCES

Barnitz, J.G. (1979). Developing sentence comprehension in reading. *Language Arts, 56,* 902-908.

Bazerman, C. (1985). *The informed writer: Using sources in the disciplines.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Byrd, P., Drum, C.A., & Wittkopf, B.J. (1981). *Guide to academic libraries in the United States for students of English as a second language.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Daiker, D. A., Kerek, A., & Morenberg, M. (1979). *The writer's*

options. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.

Grellet, F. (1981). *Developing reading skills.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kennedy, M. L., & Smith, H. L. (1986). *Academic writing with sources across the curriculum.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Klassen, B. (1976). Sentence-combining exercises as an aid to expediting syntactic fluency in learning English as a second language. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1976). *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 37/10A, 6258.

Kratcoski, P. C. (1982). Child abuse and violence against the family. *Child Welfare, 61,* 435-444.

Kuhn, T. (1957). *The Copernican revolution: Planetary astronomy in the development of Western thought.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lester, J. D. (1984). *Writing research papers.* Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman and Company.

Munsell, P., & Clough, M. (1984). *A practical guide for advanced writers in English as a second language.* New York: MacMillan.

Odean, P. (1986). *A comparison of the written paraphrases of English as a second language and native-speaking college freshmen.* Unpublished paper, University of Minnesota.

Pearson, C. R. (1981). Advanced academic skills in the low-level ESL class. *TESOL Quarterly, 15,* 413-423.

Saville-Troike, M. (1979). Reading and the audio-lingual method. *TESOL Quarterly, 7,* 24-35.

Shoemaker, C. (1985). *Write in the corner where you are.* New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Spatt, B. (1983). *Writing from sources.* New York: Random House.

Strong, W. (1973). *Sentence-combining: A composing book.* New York: Random House.

Zamel, V. (1980). Re-evaluating sentence-combining practice. *TESOL Quarterly 14,* 81-90.